

turnout among Black voters to continue for more than half a century, until the Senate passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 over 70 years later.

A recent Washington Post analysis said that this current wave of voter suppression bills potentially amounts to “the most sweeping contraction of ballot access in the United States since the end of Reconstruction.”

Today, these attacks on our freedom to vote are taking us back to the time of Reconstruction.

We cannot wait another 70 years for this so-called deliberative body to act, which is why we need to pass comprehensive voter protection legislation. But not a single Republican supports the Freedom to Vote: John Lewis Act. Many of my Republican colleagues have joined Congressman John Lewis to commemorate the March from Selma to Montgomery, but today they won't even allow the Senate to consider legislation named in his honor and have called this bill radical. There is nothing radical about protecting a person's freedom to vote. What is radical is sending us back to the days of Reconstruction.

This legislation would restore and strengthen the Voting Rights Act, which Congress reauthorized with broad bipartisan support five times—1970, 1975, 1982, 1992—and it passed 98 to 0 in 2006, which included 10 currently sitting Senate Republicans.

This bill would also expand opportunities to vote, prevent voter suppression, and improve election security. We are talking about provisions that would require States to offer early voting and no-excuse vote-by-mail, make election day a public holiday, crack down on voter intimidation, and require postelection audits. Again, I ask, how is any of this radical? What is radical is justifying overt attacks on our democracy by perpetuating the Big Lie of mass voter fraud.

For Republicans, this fight isn't about election security; it is about securing their power, because Republicans have decided that spreading misinformation and rigging elections by preventing people from voting is the only way they will retain their power.

Republicans should come to the Senate floor and tell the American people why they won't protect our freedom to vote. Instead, the Republican leader came to the floor to attack Democrats for fighting to change Senate rules to pass this critical legislation, calling it a power grab.

The Republican leader said that Democrats want to “permanently damage this institution.” He went on to say the filibuster is “about compromise and moderation”—this from the Republican leader who refers to himself as the grim reaper as he prevents dozens of House-passed bills from being considered on the Senate floor; the same person who singlehandedly prevented President Obama from filling a vacancy on the Supreme Court

for over a year, denying the will of nearly 66 million Americans who voted to give President Obama a second term in office; the same person who pushed through President Trump's Supreme Court nominee as over 159 million Americans were in the process of voting. So much for compromise and moderation.

Let's not pretend this is about the sanctity of this institution. We cannot sit back and let one political party continue to unravel the threads of our democracy one voter suppression bill at a time. While Republicans do nothing to protect our freedom to vote in the face of mass voter suppression bills enacted across the country, we Democrats cannot sit back and let 2020 be the last free and fair election in our country.

If we don't protect the right to vote, we won't have a democracy. It is that simple. That is the reality. Since the Republicans will not lift a finger to protect voting rights, we have no option but to change the Senate rules in order to pass the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act. This is something that every single Democratic Senator needs to get on board with.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

FILIBUSTER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, late last week, our Democratic colleagues briefly paused their quest to destroy the Senate's 60-vote threshold just long enough to use the 60-vote threshold themselves to block a bill.

Republicans supported sanctioning the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline that would give Russia even more leverage to bully Europe. Most of our Democratic colleagues bowed to the furious lobbying from the Biden administration to protect Putin's pipeline. There were 55 votes to pass the bill that our friends, like Ukrainian President Zelensky, desperately wanted passed, but Democrats blocked it by denying 60.

Now, many of these same colleagues have spent weeks thundering—literally thundering—that the Senate's 60-vote threshold is an offensive tool of obstruction, a Jim Crow relic, declaring that simple majorities should always get their way. Ah, but late last week, they literally wielded the 60-vote threshold themselves—a useful reminder of just how fake—fake—the hysteria has been.

We already knew Washington Democrats didn't have any principled opposition to Senate rules. Democrats repeatedly filibustered the CARES Act in March of 2020, while insisting on changes. Democrats filibustered and killed Senator TIM SCOTT's police reform bill.

You only have to go back a few years to read vigorous defenses of the filibuster from our Democratic colleagues and their allies.

The Democratic whip, Senator DURBIN, put it this way:

We need to protect the right of debate in the Senate, preserve checks and balances so that no one party can do whatever it wants. We need to preserve the voice of the minority in America.

DICK DURBIN.

The Democratic leader himself said in 2017 that we need to “find a way to build a firewall around the legislative filibuster”—build a firewall around the legislative filibuster.

Then, in a letter that same year by 32 Senate Democrats, our colleagues demanded—demanded—that the 60-vote threshold stay right where it was.

Until the last couple of years, Senators on both sides have understood the Senate is not here to rubberstamp massive changes by thin majorities. This institution exists to do exactly the opposite—to make sure major laws receive major buy-in and have major staying power, and, historically, Democratic allies outside this Chamber have recognized this as well.

Let's go back about 15 years ago when Republicans controlled the Senate. A leftwing organization called The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights published a lengthy statement defending—defending—the filibuster, including—listen to this—its relationship to civil rights.

Here is what they had to say when Republicans were in the majority here in the Senate:

On behalf of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the nation's oldest, largest, and most diverse civil and human rights coalition, with more than 180 member organizations, we urge you to oppose—

oppose—

any efforts to eliminate the 216-year-old filibuster in the United States Senate.

That is a coalition of 180 member organizations called The Civil and Human Rights Coalition.

They went on.

The elimination of the rights of the minority as embodied by the filibuster is contrary to the founding fathers' vision of the Senate as a body of equals designed to protect against the tyranny of the majority.

This statement continued.

The civil rights community has recognized and accepted the value—

The value—

of the filibuster even when it frustrated efforts to advance civil rights legislative goals. During the 1950's and 1960's, countless civil rights bills were filibustered. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was not passed until it survived 75 days of the longest filibuster in history and the Senate voted 71-29 to end debate and finally passed the bill. This legislation was enacted because of long, hard work

to build support across partisan, ideological, and regional lines. We worked to bring Americans together—not to push them farther apart.

They concluded:

We never demanded the end of the system of checks and balances. In the end, we won the battle by changing votes and not—

Not—

by breaking the rules.

These were leftwing activists writing less than 20 years ago.

So let's spell this out. Democrats want the American people to believe the filibuster was not a Jim Crow relic in 2005; it was not even a Jim Crow relic in 2020; just miraculously became a Jim Crow relic in 2021; briefly stopped being a Jim Crow relic last Thursday, but it is now back to being a Jim Crow relic this week.

Now, to be clear, the partisan election takeover bills that Democrats want to ram through this week are not—not—in any way successors of the civil rights legislation from the mid-20th century. It has been, is today, and will remain illegal to discriminate against voters anywhere in America because of their race—period. That is the law now.

Targeting Americans' online speech and sending government money to political campaigns is not about civil rights. It is about tilting the playing field. Weakening wildly popular voter ID laws and making it harder to produce accurate voter rolls is not about making voting easier; it is about making cheating easier. Changing the laws so that our partisan Attorney General can rewrite voting laws without even having to win in court is not about promoting justice; it is about short-circuiting justice. This is about one party wanting the power to unilaterally rewrite the rule book of American elections.

Now, interestingly, the Biden administration staff has gone out of its way lately to highlight my—my—long, strong record on real civil rights and real voting rights. The President's Press Secretary explained that I have "a pretty strong record of supporting voting rights." She is right about that. And that is exactly why I have no patience—none—for the unrelated partisan takeover that some Democrats are trying to rebrand with that banner.

The Democratic leader argues that his proposed elections takeover and his efforts to break the Senate are last resorts because of new State laws that passed in 2021. He says it is irrelevant that 2020 saw record turnout and—listen to this—94 percent said voting was easy because this debate is exclusively about what happened in 2021. But Democrats have been pushing these same policy charges in the same Chicken Little rhetoric since 2019, a year and a half before 2020 election, which Democrats now call a high-turnout success.

The Democratic leader gave an interview claiming that evil Republicans were trying to attack voting and dis-

enfranchise people. Of course, when Democrats went on to win the White House, the 2020 election went from presumptively illegitimate to exemplary and unquestionable overnight. Around the same time, mid-2019, Senator SCHUMER began floating a nuclear attack on Senate rules. It is completely untethered from the elections issue. He just thought breaking the rules would make for a livelier stint as majority leader.

Washington Democrats have wanted the power to rewrite the rules for political speech and election laws long, long before the events that are supposed to justify it, and the Democratic leader's effort to break the Senate long predates the latest pretext.

We have strong disagreements about the substance of these bills, but, even more broadly, we see decreasing trust in our democracy among both political sides. We have a sitting President of the United States shouting that U.S. Senators are on the side of Bull Connor and Jefferson Davis for refusing to shatter the Senate.

Was the Senate created to make these kinds of factional fevers worse or to help break the fevers? Does the Senate exist to help narrow majorities double down on divisions or to force broad coalitions to build bridges?

This fake hysteria does not prove the Senate is obsolete. It proves the Senate is as necessary as ever.

Republicans have supported this limitation on the majority's power both when we have been in the minority, which these rules protect, and when we have been the majority, which they inconvenience.

And last week, some of our colleagues across the aisle reconfirmed that they have the courage and the principle to keep their word and to protect the institution as well. But too many of our colleagues across the aisle still want to respond to a 50-50 Senate with a rule-breaking power grab.

Voting to break this institution will not be a free vote or a harmless action, even if their effort fails. An unprincipled attempt at grabbing power is not harmless just because it fails. Voting to break the Senate is not cost-free just because a bipartisan majority of your colleagues have the wisdom to stop you. It is amazing that our colleagues are this in thrall to radical activists.

We have inflation, a pandemic, rampant violent crime, a border crisis, and possibly a war on the European continent. But rather than work on any of that, Senate Democrats want to march their own legacies with a reckless—reckless—procedural vote they know will fail. A faction this desperate for unlimited short-term power is a faction that must be denied it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). The Senator from Wash-

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Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I care about the future of this institution, but right now, I care more about the future of our democracy. Our country has been the bedrock for democracies around the world. It has been the gold standard by which other countries wishing to achieve transparency and validation of their governments, have asked us to come and witness their elections.

Let's not forget what is great about a democracy. The power rests with the people. And when you have an election, it is the people who have spoken.

So whether it was F.D.R. and the New Deal, or Ronald Reagan declaring "Morning in America," the people had spoken, and the country went about the change that was implemented because of free and fair elections.

Trust me, there are countries who are jealous of this. They obviously run their countries by other means. They are less stable, and they are less egalitarian. And yet, if we think of the many great advantages of a democracy, nothing says it better than the people have spoken.

Yet now, we have a former President of the United States, Donald Trump, who has dared to say and continues to say the people haven't spoken. Donald Trump is not just like the guy at a football game who doesn't like the referee's calls. Donald Trump has taken it to a whole new level of basically, without evidence, saying his team didn't lose the game.

Can you imagine an NFL or college football structure where the coach says, "I don't like the ref's call. My team didn't lose the game. And I'm going to spend the rest of my time going, marching around to every football game and every community saying my team didn't lose the game."

Well, thank God college and professional coaches know better. They don't do this. And yet former President Trump keeps saying, I don't like the call of election officials, judges, Federal courts, never mind there were 60 decisions by different courts. I am going to protest the outcome of this election.

Never in the history of our country do I know a major race where someone declared they really didn't lose. What if everybody went around saying, I really didn't lose? What if our system of governments would be affected by that?

Well, it is getting to that level of absurdity. The Republican nominee in the 2020 Washington gubernatorial election lost by over 600,000 votes. Yet he claimed voter fraud. He lost by 56-43. And even though he lost by such a huge margin, he claimed voter fraud. He sued the secretary of state, who happened to be a Republican, in King County Superior Court. He only dropped the election fraud lawsuit after the court threatened his lawyer with making meritless claims.

Do we really understand this danger, the danger of people in our country, to